

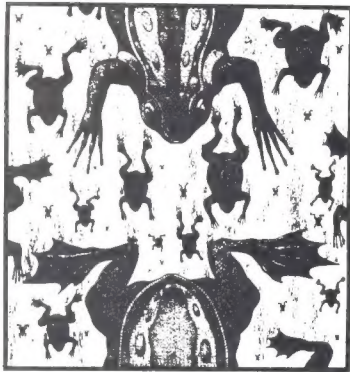
# CRUCIFIED TOAD

No. 4  
25p



THE  
BRIAN ALDISS INTERVIEW  
Michael Moorcock on 'Elric'  
Mervyn Peake & Titus Groan





**W**ell over 100,000 small toads were showered onto the village of Brignoles, Var, during what the local authorities describe as a freak storm.

M. Boum, the mayor of Brignoles, said: "Evidently the toadlings were sucked up into the clouds by a tornado."

# CRUCIFIED TOAD. No.4.

Editor; David Britton.

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Fourteen months in preparation

David Britton.

**THE BRIAN ALDISS INTERVIEW.**

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### Hippies 'turned on' by toad skin smokes

Sun-bronzed hippies in the tropical coastal resort strip of Cairns, Northern Queensland, are smoking dried toad skins for hallucinatory effects.

Police have found hippies drying skins of large toads common in sugar cane growing districts, and crushing them to a powder.

"They roll this into cigarettes and smoke it like pot. . . they claim it gives them hallucinations" and takes them on trips," said a police spokesman.

Cairns, some 1,200 miles north of Brisbane, has a large hippie colony and is frequently raided by police for drug offenders.





Mervyn Peake in Soho whilst on leave, 1944

James Branch Cabell states that the true artist writes only to express beautiful thoughts and, when doing this, has only one idea, the personal satisfaction obtained from his labours. This dictum is well illustrated in The Worm Ouroboros. It took Eddison thirty years to write this remarkable fantasy. Obviously it was a labour of love, written only to obtain a final peace of mind. There could have been no idea of recompence from a monetary view-point. He must have realised while dreaming it and placing those dreams on paper that only a relative few would buy it, or, buying it, appreciate its transcendental loveliness. The first American edition sold poorly. Its charm has been appreciated only by those exceptional personalities who silently watch a sunset fade or hear the music of waves beating on a rockbound coast. Mervyn Peake is preëminently an artist. He has also won some slight fame as a minor poet. Thirty-two years ago he started to dream of an unknown world\* and after seven years finished his first novel. He worked as an illustrator during these years, partly because he enjoyed art and no doubt because there were obligations to meet and bills to pay; but as an avocation he wrote Titus Groan. In thus doing he followed the pattern of Cabell, Eddison, Dunsany and all writers of the beautiful. His primary object must have been writing for his own pleasure; for had he spent equal time working as a plasterer or plumber his work

**MERVYN PEAKE**  
and  
**TITUS GROAN**

by  
**DAVID H. KELLER**

\*It is worth remembering that J.R.R.Tolkien was just beginning to tinker with his Lord of the Rings series, and T.H.White with what became The Once And Future King, at about this same time



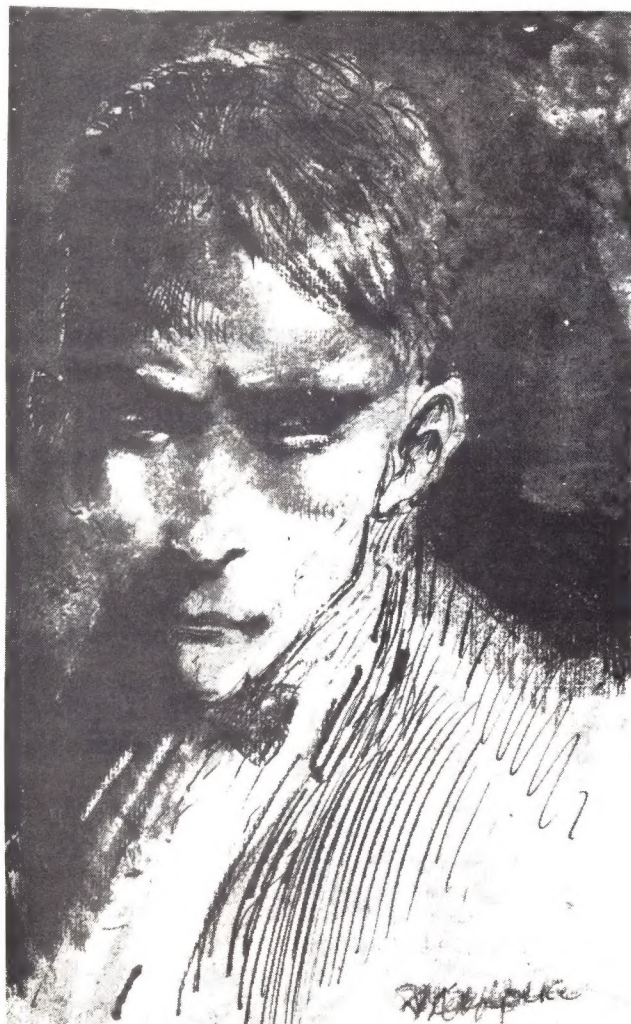
would have been less time consuming and far more remunerative. The book he wrote in those seven lean years has not been appreciated by the average reader, who does not understand it and is unwilling to make the effort to do so.

The subtitle, A Gothic Novel, is in itself deceptive, though there is a shadow of reason for its use. Elizabeth Bowen, in the Tatler, comes far closer to actual analysis when she writes, "Let us call it a sport of literature". Her use of the word sport is a fine example of the incorporation of biology into literary criticism; for a sport is something unusual in nature, like a white blackbird for instance. It occurs as rarely in literature as it does in life.

The narrative centres around the Castle of Gormenghast, which, since it is located in never-never land, cannot be found in old or modern atlases. The persons living in and around the Castle are the descendants of seventy-six generations of nobility and peasant, and during all that time they have been completely out of touch with the world. For over two thousand years they have simply lived in the Castle or around it in a weird isolation. During these centuries the Castle grew slowly, each lord making additions which were neglected by succeeding lords who had their own ideas of architecture. Thus, when the last of the line, Titus, is born, the Castle is so vast that few, if any, had visited all the rooms, or, going into one unentered for centuries, knew who has built it or why.



COUNTESS GROAN



STEERPIKE

As this family built Gormenghast they fabricated a code of behaviour, written in massive books, which in its details completely enslaved and dominated the living family. This enforced servitude to ritualism was especially onerous to the head of the family, the Lord of the Castle who had to perform the ceremonies of every day in exactly the same manner that all the previous lords had followed on that special day. This ritual was only known in its entirety by the Librarian, Sourdust, who had devoted most of his ninety years to its study. Every morning he met the Lord at breakfast and dictated to him the day's programme. From this there could never be, and never was, any deviation.

Living in the shadow of the Castle a number of common people continued an existence that was in its way as bound by routine convention as was that of the Groan nobility. The less fortunate of these served as menials in the Castle but those with artistic talent became wood-carvers. Each year these artists in wood carved what they hoped would be a masterpiece. They were judged by the current Lord of Gormenghast on the first morning of June. He selected the three best. That evening the discarded carvings were burnt but to the three winners was thrown the traditional scroll of vellum, which permitted them to walk the battlements above their mud huts on the night of the full moon of every second month. The three prizewinning carvings were then housed with their predecessors of hundreds of years in the Room of the Bright Carvings. There,





**FUCHSIA**

they were dusted daily by their curator, Rottcodd, who never left the room and for years at a time had no visitors, for no-one cared to look at the carvings. A book was provided for visitors to write their names, but no one came to look and write.

If this novel contained nothing but the story of the woodcarvers and the dual fate of their carvings it would suffice to show that the author has a keen sense of the values of life. For this is life, not only in Gormenghast but all over the world. Man, striving for greatness, enters competition with his fellow. Those who fail have their efforts destroyed; those who succeed walk in glory during every second full moon, proud that their work is being placed in some Hall of Fame, not realising that no-one visits the hall and lingers over the beauty of their masterpiece. The novel ends in the Room of Bright Carvings, where it began, thus, as in The Worm Ouroboros, completing the circle, the symbol of eternity.

All the characters are prisoners in the web of fate woven by the Spider Destiny. Lord Sepulchgrave fettered by tradition and finding happiness only in this beautiful library; the Countess with her hundreds of birds and many white cats; Fuchsia, the seventeen-year old daughter who lives in a world of dreams; Flay, the valet; Sourdust, the keeper of the archives; his one-legged son Barquentine, who waits for fifty-four years till he can become, through his father's death, the Librarian; the Ladies Cora and Clarice, twin sisters of Lord Sepulchgrave, congenital hemiplegics; the chef, Swelter, who commands a small army of assistant cooks forty apprentices and eighteen Grey Scrubbers; Dr.

Prunesquallor and his virginal sister Irma; the nurse, Mrs. Slagg, tiny and fluttering like a wren; Keda, the wet-nurse; the unnamed Poet, slightly psychotic, as all true poets are.

All these are so clearly drawn that they stand out, not as characters in a book but as living people; not so far removed from those of our world if only we would take the trouble to find them, or finding them, recognise them. Once we have met them in the book it is difficult to forget them. This is another reason for recognising the greatness of the novel. Peake not only created a world which has more than a semblance of reality, but he has peopled it with men and women who in spite of their peculiarities seem very much alive. There is a biological correctness in the symbiosis of their existence; though they may not acutely realise it, they are all mutually interdependant irrespective of the sharp difference in the strata of their social order. The greatest could not continue the sacred daily programme unless aided by the lowest. How would Lord Sepulchgrave spend the first day in June if there were no carvings to judge, the carvers refusing to compete? The very existence of all depended on each one doing his work as he always had done it, and provide for someone to carry on that work when he died.

"For every key position in the Castle there was the apprentice, either the son or the student, bound to secrecy. Centuries of experience had seen to it that there should be no gap in



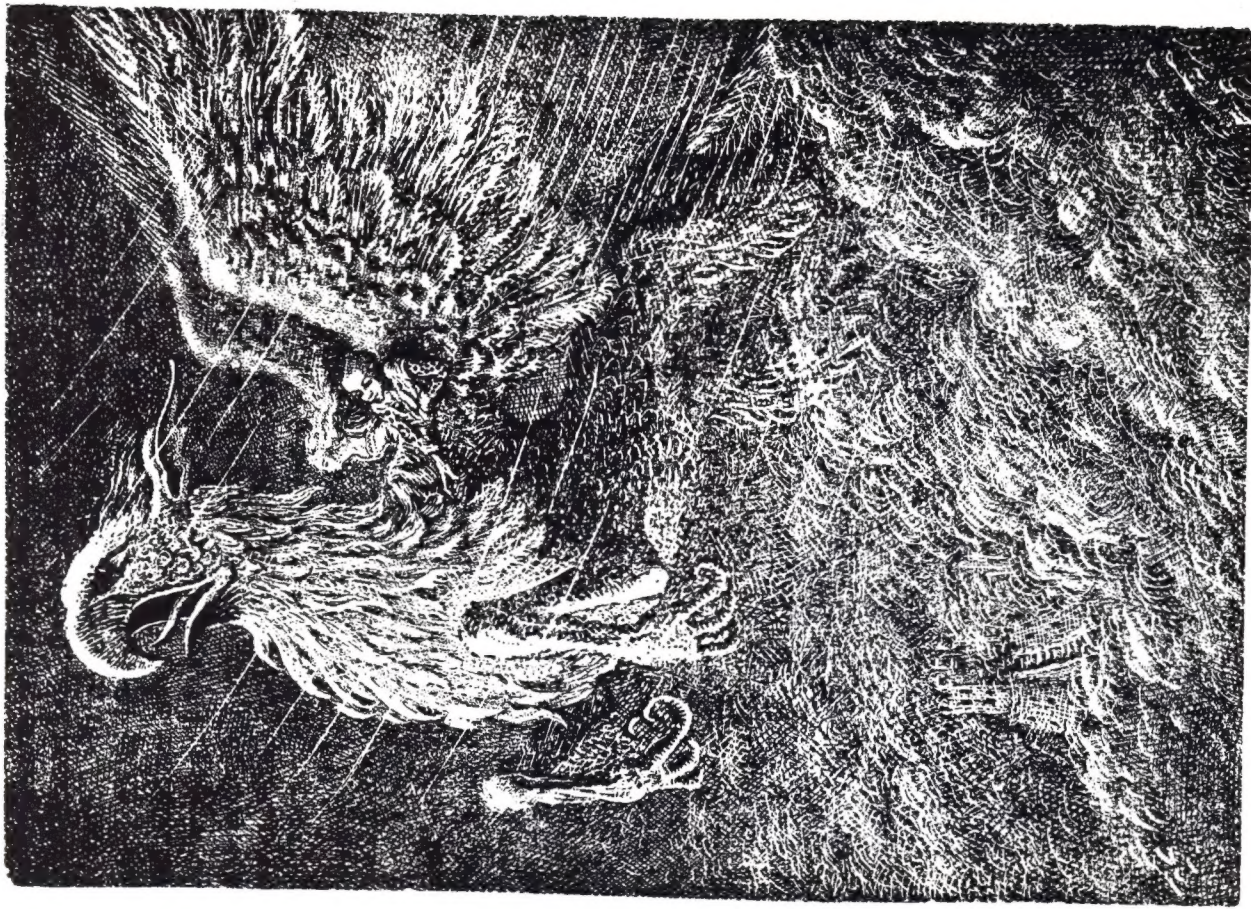


the steady stream of immemorial behaviour."

Into this community of perfectly adjusted persons comes an iconoclast, Steerpikie, a seventeen-year old boy, one of the Chef's apprentices, who rebels against convention and dreams of becoming the vicarious ruler of the Castle. He proceeds in unconventional ways, including arson, to secure power. As his programme is entirely new to the nobility they have no way to protect themselves and thus fall victim to his attack. At last the sonless Barquentine, realising that someday he will die, selects him as the future Librarian and begins his training. Thus the ambitious lad starts toward becoming ruler of the Castle and the future dictator of the daily life of the new lord, Titus Groan. Here again we see pictured not a realm of fantasy but an accurate portrayal of actual monarchies, which - growing old and bound by tradition - are unable to face new conditions. They either die, like the royal families of France and Russia or, if living on, find the actual rulers of the land a Prime Minister instead of King.

Peake has shown that he is preëminently an artist by illustrating the novel with beautiful pictures, drawn with words instead of a brush. His descriptions of various rooms in the Castle, the Library, The Room of the Bright Carvings, the attic where Fuchsia fled for solitude and dreams and painted pictures on the wall; all these are so vividly described that it is evident the writer simply wrote of pictures the artist first saw in his dreams. Back of these pictures lie allegories and it is easy to translate them into personalities; none pleasant, but all capable of finding counterparts in the human cosmos.

All is decaying. The roofs of the castle leak, the windows are broken, the armour rusts. Mould and dust creep insidiously; ivy clings to the massive walls and some day will tear them to pieces. The rulers share in the slow dissolution of all things that cease to grow.



by PEAKE



Meanwhile there is an undercurrent of revolt in the subconscious of the dwellers in the Mud Village. The Bright Carvers will, for a while, continue to compete for the yearly prize, but the young men resent the pitifully inadequate charity of the Castle. Mrs. Slagg, when she informs them of the birth of Titus, says:

"We are all very proud. All of us.

The Castle is very satisfied and when I tell you what has happened, you'll be happy as well; oh yes, I am sure you will. Because you are dependant on the Castle. You have some food thrown down to you from the battlements every morning, don't you?"

A young man lifted his thick black eyebrows and spat."

Just that, and nothing more.

Other men will join him. They will cease to carve wood and, instead, will swarm over the battlements and carve the Groans, believing that their lives will be happier if they can live in the Castle instead of the Mud Huts. In this way they will



by JIM GAWTHORN

find nothing but disappointment and disillusion; the Castle, a decaying, empty shell, holds only traditions they cannot share and remnants of the past they can never understand.

Titus Groan merely retells the story of the futility of life. It follows the historic motif of men's efforts to build new ladders to enable them to reach the stars. Too late they realise the shortness of the ladders and the distance of the stars. Wiser men would have taken the wood and built better arbors for grapevines, but men have never been wise and even philosophers fail to understand the true values of life.

The tale ends with an implication of disaster to the House of Groan. The new lord, Titus, when vested with authority, throws the ancient emblems of sovereignty into the water and looks appealingly toward his foster-sisters across the lake. Steerpike bivalently dreams of the equality of men and looks forward to the time when he will become the sole autocrat of the Castle. Fuchsia, dimly resentful of the chains which may force her to drift into a life of senile virginity, confusedly tries to make the Doctor realise that she is in love with him. The Countess continues to love her birds and cats, broods over her vengeance, and longs for the complete domination of her son. The Poet writes more poems, the Gardeners polish more apples, the new Chef prepares his meals, the Grey Scrubbers continue to wash the kitchen walls and Rottcod daily dusts the Bright Carvings; but they all move like phantasmagoria in a dream, without joy or life, without the stimulation that comes from the desire to attain new objectives.

Titus Groan achieves greatness because, within the confines of the Castle and the Mud Huts it poises many of the important problems of all time. It is more than a narrative of the Groan family; it is a resume of all human behaviour. To this allegory is added a weird beauty, a literary style that could be used only by an artist and presents a combination of values that is unusual in present-day writing. Few will appreciate it; the masses will ignore it; but those who understand it will read and re-read it, pleasuring at new-found beauty and thrilling at discovering a hitherto unseen lovely picture, or a philosophical truth far older than the Castle.

End



# Black Soul



The following vignette, an atmospheric mood-piece, reveals a marked talent for fantasy; Miss Brooks is 14 years old.

## Kathryn Brooks



Hades' black horse from hell thundered past the tall, dark poplars, the entrance to his kingdom flowered dread, fumes of the dead, echoed through the ears of the Black Soul from which once lived a stallion of glory and light. Now only death breathed in his soul and the air of past glory stared in his red eyes.

He held high his head into the dark oblivion of the sky where forbidding clouds chased and skudded. A long sorrow was recalled from his earlier memories and the shadow of the past reached his motionless heart.

He turned and passion and fire seemed to burn through his eyes piercing down into the dark crevices of the rocky, dry earth. Then he lifted his sturdy leg and his withers twitched nervously and glimmered with blue coldness from the cold gleam of the moon.

Suddenly a loud, mournful trumpeting sounded from the dark depths of the lonely cavern, the wild horse stirred and almost with fear whinnied to the cold wind that stirred in the high, black treetops, the whispering of swaying leaves seemed to stop to listen, even they seemed in dread of what was to come.

A grotesque figure dressed in black and dark armour strode with determination to the quivering beast. Evil walked with Hades as he took his shield and grimacing, patted the death horse's flank.

"Black Soul, now enter the underworld and be harnessed to the chariot of death for eternity and speak with the voices of ghosts."

Now Hades' voice grated through the still air all around a hush seemed to glow insecurity. The powerful horse seemed helpless against the god of death, slightly trembling it raised it's eyes and tried to look into the empty coldness of Hades.

The King of the Underworld, pale from his reign below, motioned towards the darkness, the hole of death gaped yawned, horrifyingly inviting the stallion to dare step it's trodden stones.

"Go now, Black Soul, tread the stones that show themselves to no-one who can return, go and try the life of death," he hesitated, "never again to see the outside of this great hole or the black poplars that mark this entrance for in my kingdom the song of life is dead and the tune of the immortal rings through the empty corridors. Dear friend, you must trust I, the great King, for as I tread flowers die at my feet. I, the King of Death."

Now the horse stamped feverishly and sweated tears of fear, timid but bold he moved hesitantly towards the cave. Now this great horse had served one life and now began death.

He would soon forget the pleasures of the overworld and would join the black horses that grazed the black pastures of hell. Perhaps one day we shall meet black steed and the cracked voice of Hades shall ring in my ears as did with you. Walk those passages, perhaps at first with dread, but remember, there is always an end this end must come to everyone.



# ELRIC

Here in the form of a letter replying to a series of articles on ELRIC -- published in the American fanzine 'Niekas' 1963 -- Moorcock speculates on the literary sources for his albino hero.



Very nice of you to devote so much time to Elric -- though he doesn't altogether merit it! I'd disagree with the writer when he says "I expect the 'sword and sorcery' stories are by far the most popular type...etc." I think those who like them receive them enthusiastically, but it's a fairly small minority compared with those who like, for instance, "science fantasy" of THE DRAGON MASTERS variety and the stuff Kuttner, Brackett and others used to turn out for Starling. Super Science, etc. These days people seem to want information of some kind with their escapism -- and "sword and sorcery" doesn't strictly supply information of the type required. (The appeal of James Bond appears to be based primarily on the lumps of pseudo-data inserted every-so-often in the narrative.) The only "sword and sorcery" stuff I personally enjoy reading is Leiber's. Don't go much for Tolkien, Dunsany, Smith, Howard -- or Edgar Rice Burroughs in spite of what some critics have said of my books recently.

Though I didn't know Science Fantasy was due to fold when I wrote it I wound up the Elric series just in time to catch the last issue quite by coincidence. I had intended to kill off Elric (as is probably plain from the 2nd story in the currently appearing quartette, "Black Sword's Brothers") and his world, so it is just as well. A story set in a world which closely borders Elric's that some of the place names are the same will be appearing in Fantastic some time this year. This was originally called "Earl Aubec and the Golem" but the title has been changed to "Master of Chaos" (the cosmology is identical with the Elric stories cosmology) and will be, if Cele Goldsmith likes the next one I'm planning, the first of a series showing the development of the Earth from a rather unusual start. It is vaguely possible that Elric will appear in future stories and some of his background background not filled in in the concluding stories ("Sad Giant's Shield" in 'Science Fantasy' No. 63 & "Doomed

# MICHAEL MOORCOCK



Lord's Passing" in SF 64) will be filled in there. But this depends on how the series develops and what Cele Goldsmith thinks of the stories. "Masters of Chaos" is, I think, in many ways my best S&S tale.

(It is a great disappointment, however, that Science Fantasy has folded. Not simply because stories sold to it paid my rent, but because for me and many other writers in this country (particularly, like me, the younger ones) it was an outlet for the kind of story that is very difficult to sell in America -- even to Cele Goldsmith who appears to be the most openminded of the U.S. editors. Particularly this went for the short novel of the "Earth is but a Star" length and the recent 37,000 word "Skeleton Crew" by Aldiss. The slow developing, borderline-mainstream story of the kind Ballard does so well will find more difficulty selling in the states too, though Ballards "Question of Re-entry" was of this kind and published in Fantastic. It seems a pity that English SF has reached, in people like Ballard and Aldiss, an exceptionally high standard and a strongly English flavour and now has no markets here.

The landscapes of my stories are meta-physical, not physical. As a faltering atheist with a deep irradicable religious sense (I was brought up on an off-beat brand of Christian Mysticism) I tended, particularly in the early stories like "While the God's Laugh," to work out my own problems through Elric's adventures. Needless to say, I never reached any conclusions, merely brought these problems closer to the surface. I was writing not particularly well, but from the "soul". I wasn't just telling a story, I was telling my story. I don't think of myself as a fantasy writer in the strict sense -- but the possibilities of fantasy attract me. For some sort of guide to what I see as worth exploiting in the fantasy form, I'd suggest you bear this in mind when you read "The Deep Fix" which will appear in the last issue of Science Fantasy along with "Dead God's Passing", the last Elric story....which might also provide a clue. "Deep Fix" will be under a pseudonym (the late James Colvin, ed.).

I am not a logical thinker. I am, if anything, an intuitive thinker. Most facts bore me. Some inspire me. Nuclear physics, for instance, though I know scarcely anything about the field, excites me, particularly when watching a nuclear physicist explaining his theories on TV. My only interest in any field of knowledge is literary. This is probably a narrow interest, but I'm a writer and want to be a good one. I have only written two fantasy stories in my life which were deliberately commercial (sorry, three -- one hasn't been published). These were "Going Home" in Science Fiction Adventures and "Kings in Darkness" in Science Fantasy. The rest, for better or worse, were written from inside. Briefly, physics doesn't interest me -- metaphysics does. The only writer of SF I enjoy is J.G.

Ballard. The only writer of fantasy currently working in the magazines I like is Leiber. The three works of fantasy I can still re-read and enjoy, apart from those, are Anderson's BROKEN SWORD, Peake's Titus Groan trilogy, and Cabell's Jurgen. Anderson has done nothing better than THE BROKEN SWORD, in my opinion, and I sometimes feel that his talent has since been diverted, even lessened. I feel that writing SF can ruin and bleed dry a writer's talent. The best he can do in this field is improve his technique -- at the expense of his art. I think of myself as a bad writer with big ideas, but I'd rather be that than a big writer with bad ideas -- or ideas that have gone bad. I tend to think of the SF magazine field as a field in which it is possible to experiment -- and sell one's mistakes; but the impulse to sell tends to dominate the impulse to experiment the longer one stays in the field.

And fear of death, incidentally, is probably another source of inspiration in the Elric stories. I don't believe in life after death and I don't want to die. I hope I shan't. Maybe I'll be the exception that proves the rule...

Now for some specific remarks about the Elric material in "Niekas". Firstly, a few carping points on the spelling. As you'll see from the book (STEALER OF SOULS), which I had an opportunity to get at before it was printed, there is an accented é in the spelling of Melniboné. Melnibonay -- this accent was, of course, left out of all but the first story. Imrryr is spelt thus. Count Smiorgan Baldhead -- not of Baldhead (his head was hairless).

A point about the end of "The Dreaming City". Elric used the wind to save himself, abandoning his comrades to the dragons. This, and Cymoril's death, is on his conscience.





# THE STEALER OF SOULS

...BEING PART ONE OF  
THE CHRONICLES OF  
THE BLACK SWORD.

FOR 10,000 YEARS  
DID THE BRIGHT EMPIRE  
OF MELNIBONÉ WAX

ELRIC, PRINCE OF RUINS



I don't know whether the Imrryrians would have despised Elric (2nd story synopsis, line 1). I think of them as accepting his treachery fairly calmly, and yet bound to do something about it if they caught up with him.

When I wrote this story I was thinking of Stormbringer as a symbol -- partly, anyway -- of Man's reliance on mental and physical crutches he'd be better off without. It seems a bit pretentious, now. I suppose you could call the Dharzi zombie men, but really I didn't think of them as men at all, in the strict sense. The sea is, of course, an underground sea -- and also not "natural" as Elric discovered. The hill, castle, etc. -- all the bits and pieces in this episode -- are all underground. There was the intention here to give the whole episode the aspect of taking place within a womb. The book is a similar symbol to the sword in this story. Again, in the end of this story, he leaves Shaarilla to her fate -- abandoning her. At this period of my writing women either got killed or had some other dirty trick played on them. The only female character who survived was my own La Belle Dame Sans Merci -- Yishana. I won't explain here -- too personal....

"The exact nature of the feud is a mystery"

("Theleb K'aarna" line 6). Maybe it wasn't clear enough here -- but I have the idea that I explained somewhere how Theleb K'aarna had devised a means of sending Elric on a wild-goose chase by loosing some supernatural force or other against him. This was why Elric wanted blood. That story by the way was the most popular of the first three. I guess a Freudian psychologist would know why....

"Kings in Darkness" I'd rather not deal with, since it was the worst of the series and, as I mentioned, written commercially. Therefore there is little of it which fits in with what I like to think of as the real content of the Elric series.

No comments, either, on "The Flame Bringers" -- although I enjoyed writing the Meerclar bit and the last sequence with Elric on the back of the dragon. This, I think, is nothing much more than an adventure story, though it serves to show up Elric's weakness in that the moment things get tough he's seeking his sword again. Also the last bit where the sword returns is a hint of the sword's "true" nature.

In the book version of the last quartette (of which "Black Sword's Brothers" is the first part) I've revised the opening a bit. It was -- and C.R. Kearns pointed this out and I agreed with him -- what you

might call a confused start. In the final revision of the short story version I changed it fairly considerably from the original and one or two inconsistencies crept through -- I was working hard at the time and was very tired.

I would rather you had left this story out or waited until all four had been published before synopsising it since this is the first part of a novel and many issues are not clarified until the end. I'm not happy with any of the magazine stories as they stand and have made, in places, quite heavy revisions. The last story to be written is, I feel, the best though. A final word -- the Lords of Chaos hated Tanelorn not because it was a utopia, but because nearly all those in the city had once owed them, the Lords, allegiance and had forsworn it when they came to Tanelorn (or so the story goes). This is probably the most overtly philosophical or mystical of the Young Kingdom tales, as you say, and took much longer to write than the rest. It could be improved, I feel, by more play on the actual characters involved.

The writer feels that "Black Sword's Brothers" was the duller Elric story. It was certainly, as explained above, one of the most patchy from the point of view of construction. It's true, in one sense, that I was losing interest in the Elric series -- or rather that I had reached a point before it was written where I had run out of inspiration. But the interest picked up as I began to write and, by the time I'd got into the second part I was enjoying the writing again. I think it's possible to look at the Elric stories as a sort of presentation of the crude materials which I hope to fashion into better stories later. Being non-logical, I have to produce a great deal of stuff in order to find the bits of it I really want. My ideas about Law and Chaos and the rest became clearer as I wrote. Of the four, "Black Sword's Brothers" and "Sad Giant's Shield" (the most recently published) are the weakest in my opinion. Both were revised (something I do not usually do with the Elric stories) and both suffered from this revision. I think. My mind was at its clearest (not very clear by normal standards) when I wrote "Doomed Lord's Passing." I've found that I can only really learn from my mistakes after they've been published, which is hard on the reader.

Ted Carnell, who handles my other work as well, said that he felt "Earl Aubec and the Golem" (or "Master of Chaos") was a sort of crystallisation of everything I'd been working on in the





Elric series. Maybe not everything, but I think he's right. Earl Aubec is more a kind of sword-and-philosophy tale than an outright sword-and-sorcery. Elric tales -- or the best of them -- were conceived similarly.

The writer thinks that John Rackham's fantasies (or properly "Occult-thrillers") will outlast my stories. I don't think either will last for long, but I might as well admit that I was slightly hurt by this remark, for Rackham's stories that I have read struck me as being rather barren, stereotyped tales with no "true" sense of the occult at all (whatever a true sense of the occult is). Moreover I know John doesn't believe in his stuff for a second (at least not in any supernatural sense) whereas I believe wholeheartedly in mine, as I've pointed out. It's silly to take up someone's remark like this, especially since it is fair

criticism and just a statement of someone's individual taste, but I suppose I'm still young enough to feel defensive about my stories -- especially my Elric stories for which I have an odd mixture of love and hate. They are so closely linked to my own obsessions and problems that I find it hard to ignore any criticisms of them and tend momentarily to leap to their defence.

As I said earlier, and Cele Goldsmith said in a supplement to AMRA, sword and sorcery seems to appeal to an enthusiastic minority and may receive a large volume of praise from a fairly small section of readers.

When Carnell asked me to think up a sword - and - sorcery series I tried to make it as different as possible from any other I'd read. I'd hesitate to agree that the two best known magic swords are Excalibur and Prince Valiant's "Singing Blade" -- Excalibur, certainly, and





probably Rolands Durandala. The idea of the magic sword came, of course, from Legend, but I willingly admit to Anderson's influence, too. The idea of an albino hero had a more obscure source. As a boy I collected a pre-war magazine called UNION JACK. This was Sexton Blake's Own Paper -- Blake was the British version of your Nick Carter. I should imagine, and UNION JACK was the equivalent of your Dime Novels. One of Blake's most memorable opponents was a character named M. Zenith -- or Zenith the Albino, a Byronic hero-villain who aroused more sympathy in the reader than did the intrepid detective. Anyway, the Byronic h-v had always appealed; I liked the idea of an albino, which suited my purpose, and so Elric was born -- an albino. Influences include various Gothic novels, also. Elric is not a new hero to fantasy -- although he's new, I suppose, to s-and-s.

I can't altogether agree that Elric remains an essentially simple character. I think of him as complex but inarticulate when he tries to explain his predicament. His taste for revenge seems to be a sort of extension of his search for peace and purpose -- he finds, to coin a phrase, forgetfulness in action. Elric's guilt over the slaying of Nikora was guilt for the slaying itself, not because he'd killed a particular man.

I don't know whether I could have left Moonglum out and kept the stories much the same. Moonglum is, apart from everything else, to some extent a close, valued friend of mine who has been a lot of help in various ways over the last few years. If Elric is my fantasy self, then Moonglum is this friend's fantasy self (as I see him at any rate). I am not particularly gloomy by nature, I put Moonglum in to make remarks about Elric when he gets too self-absorbed or too absorbed in self-pity, etc.

A little more of Elric's background and some clue as to why he is what he is will be found in "Dead God's Passing." I've been aware of this absence and have tried to rectify it a bit here.

I was pleased that you have used the Grey Mouser as comparison since, as must now be evident, I'm a great

fau of the Mouser's. Perhaps Moonglum also owes a little to the Mouser. As for Elric being an idealist rather than a materialist, this is probably because I'm often told I'm a materialist rather than an idealist. I don't like to be told this, but it could be true.

Elric's disregard for danger is of the nature of panic rather than courage, maybe. The Mouser, on the other hand, seems not to disregard danger -- he evaluates it then acts. Conan -- well....

The cosmology of the Elric stories probably owes its original inspiration to two things -- Zoroastrianism (which I admire) and Anderson's Three Hearts and Three Lions. It was developed from there, of course.

The set-up, simply, is:

COSMIC HAND

"

"

"

"

balance

Law Chaos

Grey Lords

Elementals

Men

Beasts

Law Sorcerers  
Men pledged to Law

Chaos Sorcerers  
Men pledged to Chaos

I have a more complex chart. The sixth story is the one where the cosmology becomes clearer and the reader should realise the rest as he reads the last stories.

I have probably helped anyone who wants to assess the Elric stories on a slightly different level. Who wants to ?.







GOLDEN SHOWERS.  
LOW NAPALM HOVENIA.  
THE PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCH.  
JOCKAMO'S DILEMMA.  
WRECK A PUM PUM.  
THREE KINDS OF AIR; PART ONE.  
THREE KINDS OF AIR; PART TWO.



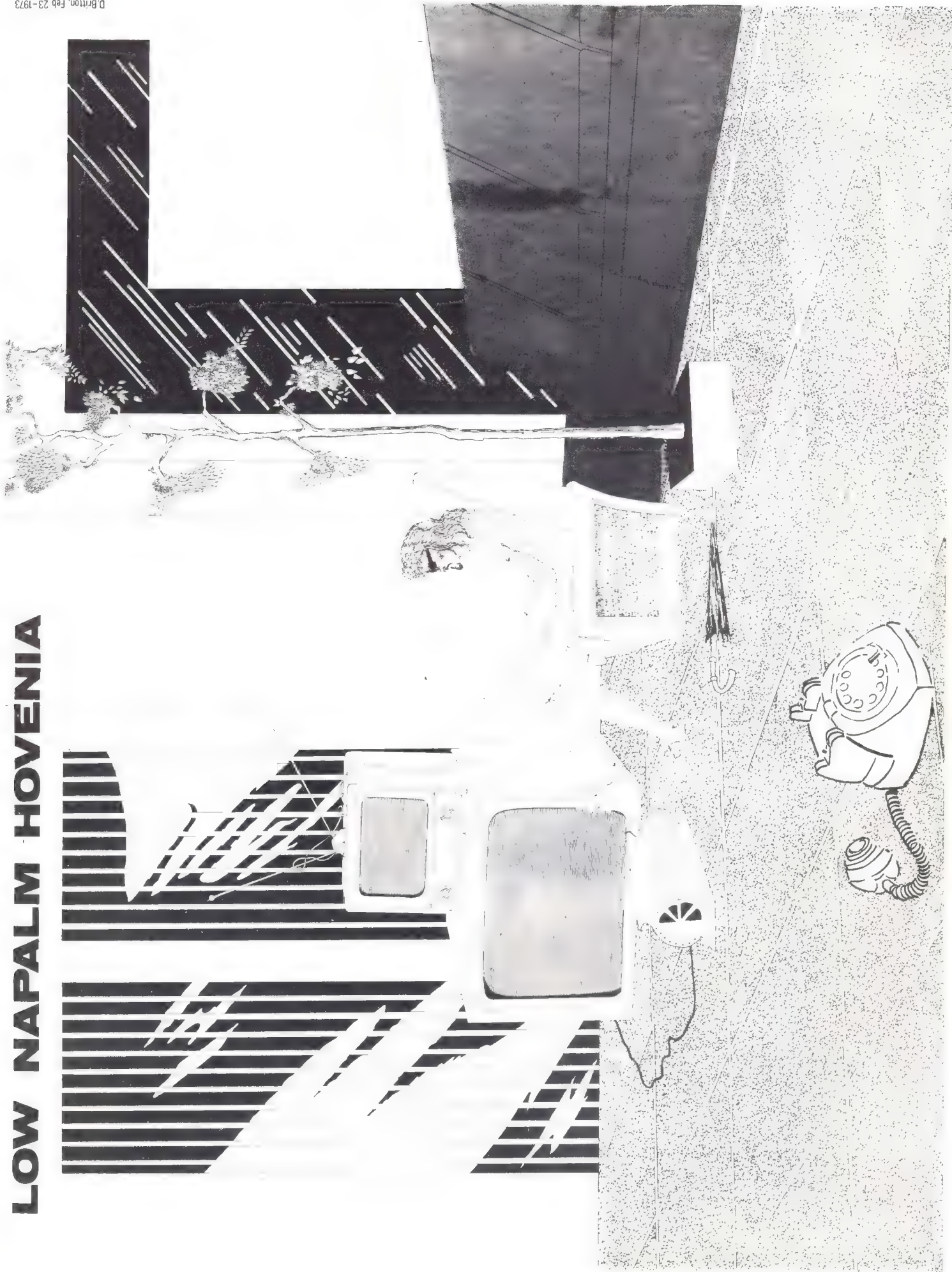
# GOLDEN SHOWERS





# LOW NAPALM HOVENIA

D Britton, Feb 23-1973





# THE PARTICULAR BAPTIST CHURCH



VASARELY

W. KANDINSKY

GUSTAV KLIMT

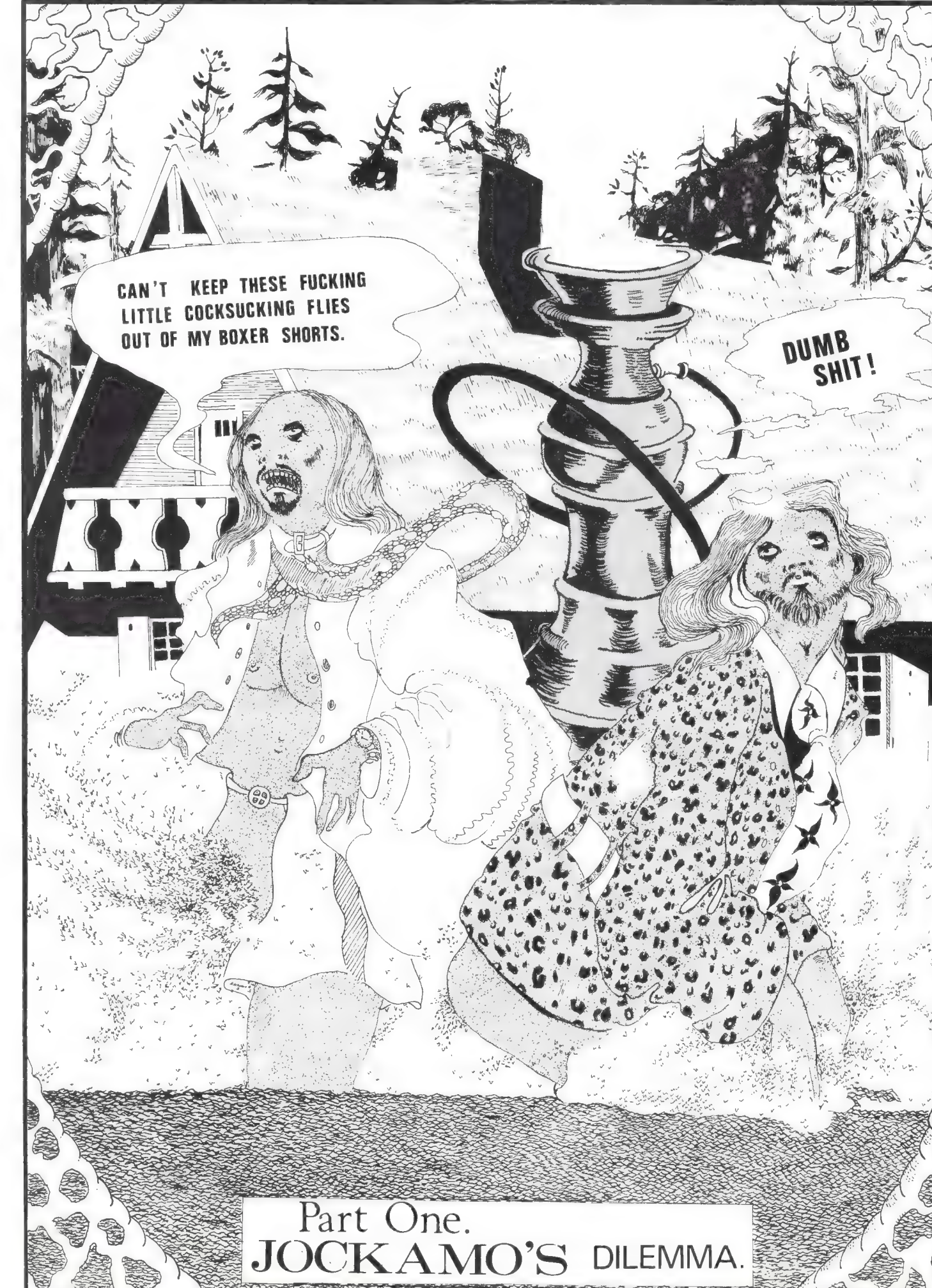
PAUL KLEE

JACKSON POLLOCK

MARCEL DUCHAMP

D. Britton, 28-May-1973



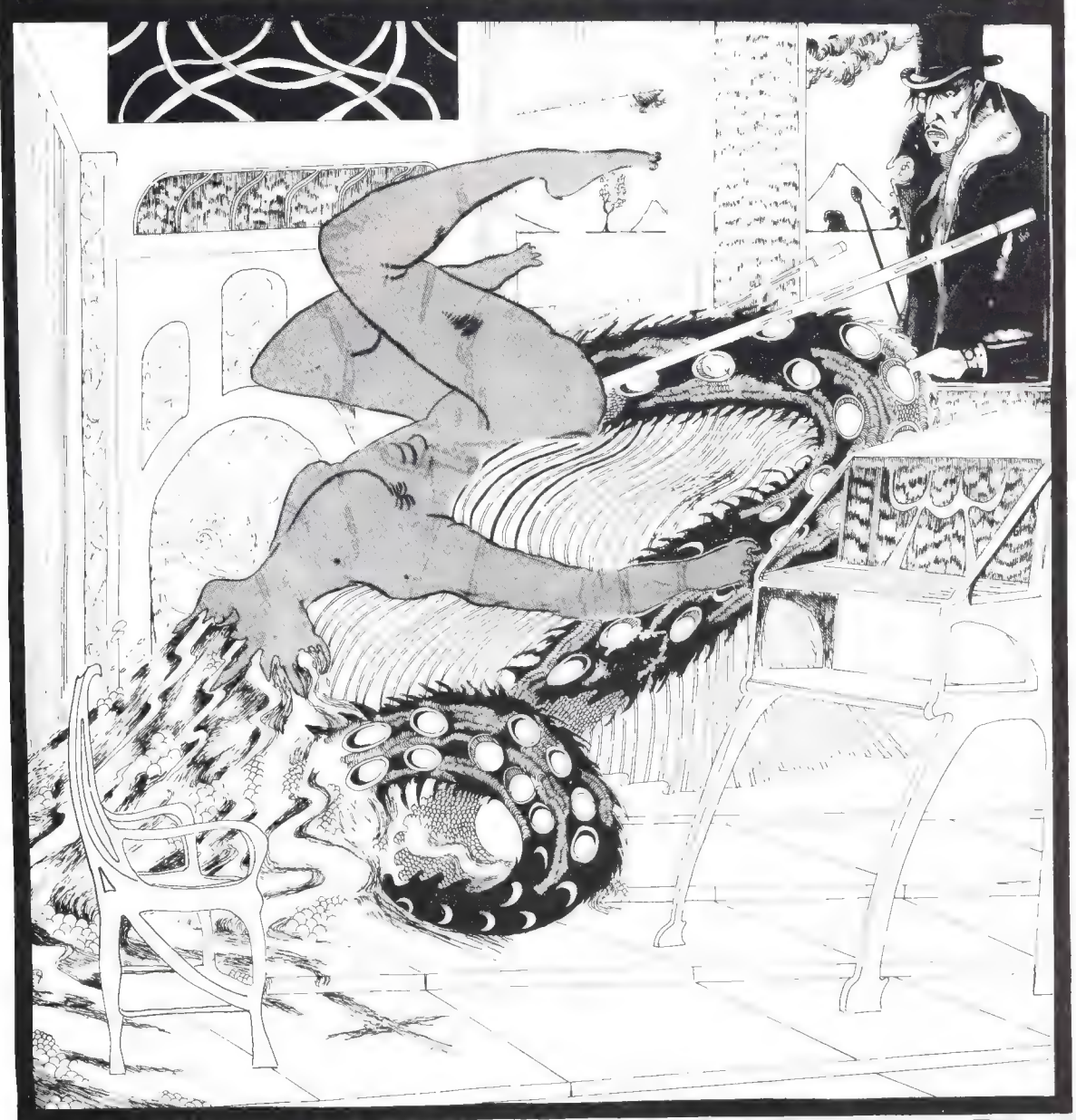


CAN'T KEEP THESE FUCKING  
LITTLE COCKSUCKING FLIES  
OUT OF MY BOXER SHORTS.

DUMB  
SHIT!

Part One.  
**JOCKAMO'S DILEMMA.**





**WRECK A PUM PUM**



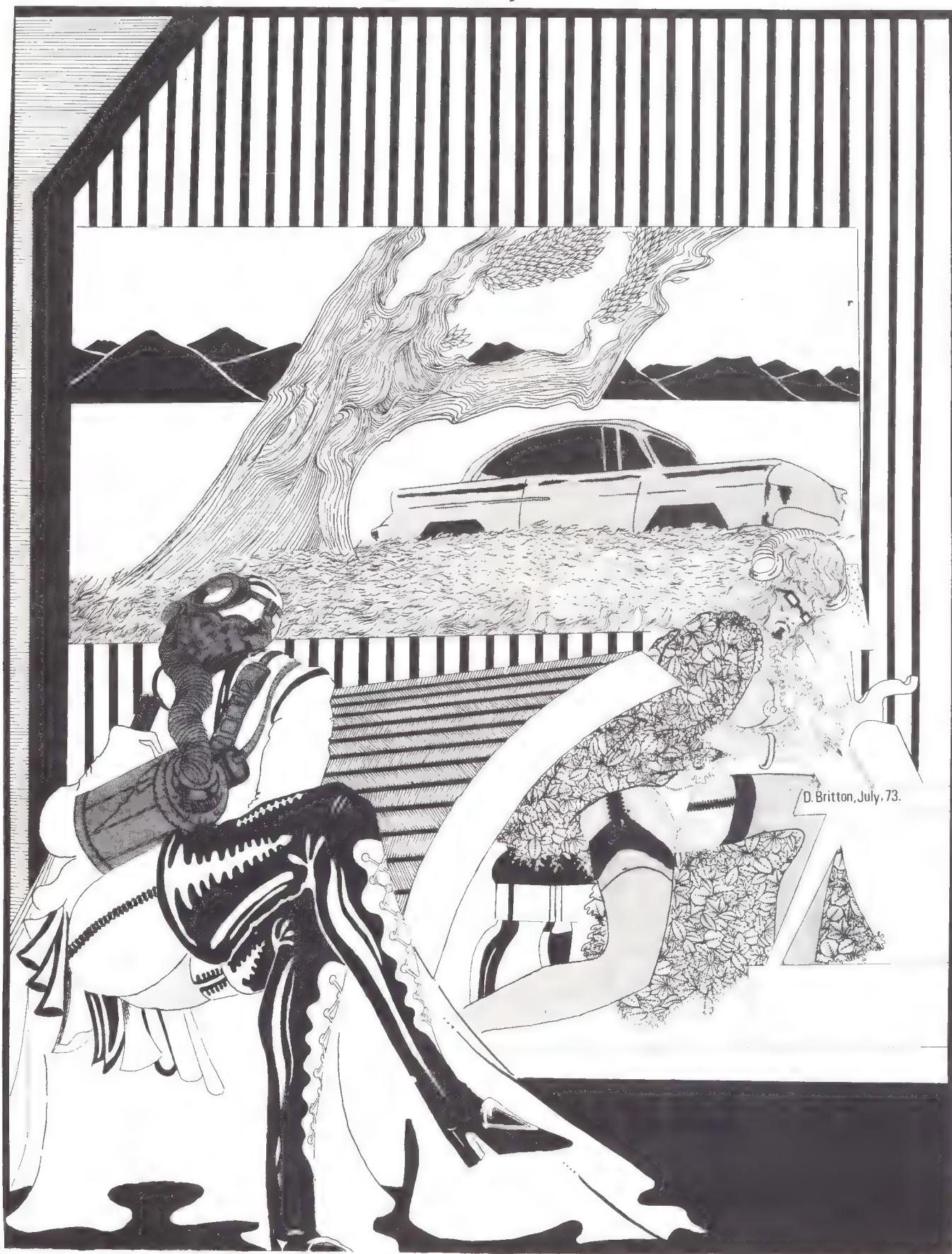
# THREE KINDS OF AIR <sup>PART</sup> ONE



D. Britton, June 73



# THREE KINDS OF AIR<sup>PART</sup> TWO







Brian W. Aldiss

# BRIAN W. ALDISS

interviewed by  
CHARLES PARTINGTON

The following interview was recorded at the 1972 Easter SF Convention.

Aldiss: REPORT ON PROBABILITY A is now one of the few novels I can enter at will, and still like and feel for. It seems to me that a lot of writers pursue in their lives precisely the sort of repetition that I've built into it. It's a tricky sort of thing playing with boredom. How far can you go? How far dare you bore the reader to show him what everyday life is like? And especially science fiction readers in particular want to escape into those lovely, gaudy universes, right? E.E. Smith and all that. REPORT is the anti-E.E. Smith novel if you like, where life in the novel is just about as drab and repetitive and mysterious as it is in real life. That is what I was trying to do.

Partington: How did you feel about reaction from the fans to that novel, because it wasn't very well received was it?

Aldiss: Oh, you know, fans are very kind; but although they are only a tiny part of the readership they don't come up and say, except for the psychotics, "Brian that was a fucking awful novel." They just don't mention it. And perhaps after a year or two they read it again and see there was some merit in it after all. And then they are very generous. They come up and say, "Just read PROBABILITY A again, and you know, it isn't half as bad as I thought it was."

Partington: I remember that happening with THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. A lot of people read that book and their initial reaction was one of, well not disgust, but unease. Then when I spoke to several fans later on about it, some months later, when they had re-read it, they found it significant.

Aldiss: There is a lot in it. But you know, one of the snags is that I don't build my books like a lot of other science-fiction writers. In THE DARK LIGHT YEARS, you've probably heard me say this, what made me write it was a burst of anger against Dr John Lilly and his horrible book on dolphins. His assumption was that dolphins are almost as intelligent as man, maybe as intelligent, so we must communicate. Now, how do we do it? We saw a hole in their skulls and sink electrodes in their brains. And this seems to me the worst side of the



Charles Partington



scientific method. What a way to try and get anything! It's the sort of thing he'd do with blacks if he could get them. It's such a degrading thing

At this point the telephone rings. Brian has been asked to appear on the David Frost Show, due to be shown live the following day, Sunday. What follows is Brian's answers to the show's organiser. We found it amusing.....

Aldiss: "Oh, what now? Hello. Yes, well I drove pretty hard up from Southmoor and in fact it took me five hours, and I was pushing hard in a Volvo. I don't know what they've got locally but maybe they wouldn't do it any faster. It looks simple enough on a map but it's a very, very long way.....How much hair did he tear out? Good. You haven't thought of asking my friend Kingsley Amis, I suppose? Yes. Yes, Oh, well he's at some celebrity's do. Ask me some other time. Yes.....C.S. Lewis is dead. Yes, some other time." To hell with it. Now, where was I? Oh yes, the point I wanted to make about DARK LIGHT YEARS was this. I'd read another book, a book called MADKIND, a profound and mad thing by a man called Berg. And it seemed to me that his thesis that mankind was mad, that the whole species had somehow got a twist, was proved by this cruel nonsense about dolphins. So this is what I put in the book. But there's only one place where I state the theme in so many words. The whole novel is built around that theme. But instead of saying it all the time I only say it once and then it's by a character called Mrs Warhoon. She suddenly says, "Well you know, mankind's mad. The reason that you don't like the Utods is because their way of life is different, they wallow in their own dung. But that's all right. That's their way. Mankind had separated himself from all those basic natural things, and is so obsessed with plumbing that he has lost his natural life." And instantly all the other characters turn round and destroy her and say, "Oh piss off. Come off this coprophiliac kick! Forget about it. Now come on, talk sense". And that's all. So on the surface it appears I'm for these horrible ideas. But you know in real life the true view point is often argued out of court like that. But never the less it survives. And I think that's what happens in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. People read it and long afterwards the truth dawns. "Aldiss isn't just being horrible, he's on the side of light and goodness!" Writing in this oblique method is partly a reaction against all the diagrammatic science fiction. You know -- where there's an idea or thesis to prove, and the writer begins and ends with that thesis and the whole story's so built around one idea that real life doesn't enter into it. If you read Shakespeare's plays - take 'Romeo And Juliet', a nurse comes in and has a



little tiny part to play. But she enters talking about something else before she gets down to activating that bit of plot. Thus Shakespeare sets a sense of reality creeping in. Because that's how people are: They've got something they primarily want to do -- seduce a girl let's say -- but never the less they're turning around signing a contract or having another drink. Your mind's on more than one thing; This is the method that I try to employ in my books. Partington: You mentioned starting a novel, the way you planned or didn't plan THE DARK LIGHT YEARS. Do you work from a tight plot, or do you tend to evolve it as you go along? Aldiss: I write a lot of notes, but that's the painful bit -- getting it right first of all. I think methods vary from book to book. I was so angry with THE DARK LIGHT YEARS that the idea I'd got was sufficient to throw me right into the book and carry me all the way through. This was when I was living in the center of Oxford. There was a fan group there, the Speculative Fiction Group, and they were always coming around. I shut them out for a month, shut everyone out and just went ahead and bashed that book off. I generally write painfully slowly, but in this case I knew exactly what I wanted to do and went ahead and did it. Partington: You say that you normally write painfully slowly, but in your autobiographical work, THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS you state that you sat down and wrote it in a fever, working till all hours. Is this so? Why is it different?



Aldiss: Well, SHAPE'S not a work of fiction, and it's something I forced myself to do everyday as a sort of diary. Partington: You're not gripped by anything then? Aldiss: Well, yes. I've got to a stage where at any time I've noted down outlines for five or six novels, and I mull them over and then finally work on one. But it has to be the one I'm most gripped with, otherwise I can't do it. Writing doesn't get any easier. You'd think that the more novels you write the easier it gets but in fact it gets harder because you've set yourself new problems if you're actually interested in writing as opposed to just selling to Ace, whoever. You spend a lot of time thinking; now what's going to interest me sufficiently to carry me through the next six months of writing?, and that question gets more and more difficult to answer. Partington: What about anxiety levels, do you still have them to any degree when you're starting a new book? Aldiss: No, I don't have any anxiety. I'd probably be an anxious guy if I didn't write, but on the whole I'm fairly relaxed; when I have a story materialising I start worrying about the characters. Then I'm all right Jack! I'm worrying about them and not me - just a sort of obsessional occupation I have. Partington: Could you tell us more about your new fantasy cycle, THE DAY WE EMBARKED FOR CYTHERA?



Aldiss: Well, I liked that a lot. Sometimes when you've written you feel that it hasn't got any meaning for you. Sometimes it seems to have the true elixir. And the more I thought about that story, the more I liked it. And in a way the sorrier I was that I had put in the interpolated bits of menace with the machine taking over.

Partington: Would you class it as fantasy?

Aldiss: Without those machine bits, it's manifestly fantasy.

Partington: You would n't object to a fantasy tag on it then?

Aldiss: No. And you see, this is a perfect fantasy cycle. Having written CYTHERA, I then thought, 'Here's a perfect world. Peaceful, picturesque, rather shoddy around the edges.' It seemed like one of my ideal worlds, and I have now written four more stories around it. That was at the beginning of last year when I was really rather ill and not feeling up to doing a novel; I couldn't concentrate. I thought I would do a series of short stories based on that little world of Cythera. So I sketched it out in more detail and thought I would make it a sort of mini-utopia, predominantly eighteenth century and Italian, but also with nice things like primitive steam engines and little dinosaurs and what-not in it. I only got around to writing four and was going to wait and see if I could possibly write twelve. I finally sent one to Damon Knight and said (I've got another project going with Damon) they've all got titles of paintings, some real, some fictitious, and the first one was called- oh shit, which was the first one.... CASTLE WITH PENITENTS, no, SERPENT BURNING ON AN ALTAR, that's right. There's a little etching by Tiepolo, a strange thing, people digging Punchinellos out of the ground, and wicked toad-like magicians with enormous.... (Tape hiss drowns out description, enormous what, Brian?) Absolutely fantastic, all done about seventeen-fifty or something like that.

Partington: Ballard uses a similar method as inspiration for some of his stories, only he uses Dali and the surrealists.

Aldiss: I wonder if he does? Maybe. Max Ernst and things. Yes.

Partington: It seems to me you're doing the same kind of thing, but with a different school of painters.

Aldiss: Yes. I wasn't thinking along those lines at first. Although there is a painting by Fragonard called 'The Embarkation for Cythera'.

Partington: Yes, we've seen this one.

Aldiss: With the little figures sort of lingering by the lake in one last embrace - oh, a lovely poignant thing! That was the inspiration for the first story. And eventually they do embark and they're going back to some sort of reality. Later, the inspiration was these Tiepolos, which are mentioned in the SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS. I've been trying to buy one but they are more expensive than I thought.



They had some in Agnew's....Eight hundred pounds! Anyhow, SERPENT BURNING ON AN ALTAR - that was the first story, and I sent it to Damon, who was charming about it. I said: "Please don't buy it unless you really like it." I didn't tell him why, but he wrote back and said, "Alright. Brain, I really like it and I'll buy it." So I said, "Right, well there are three more for you. Will you buy these too?" (Laughs) And he did and he's going to publish them, whether rightly or wrongly I don't know, all in one batch in a future ORBIT anthology.

Partington: In one of your letters to me you said you were a little dispondent about these because you had no reaction to them. Presumably you had farmed them out to other publishers?

Aldiss: I sat on them for a year and then I sent them to my agent, Hilary Rubinstein. And you know, they're nothing, they don't fit into any classification. They are not overtly erotic, they are not science fiction, they are not sword and sorcery. They are too bloody long for people who might have accepted them if they were shorter. There was no one around who would publish them. And this, I thought, was quite a decisive thing. What do you do in the end? You send them to a science fiction editor because he will take a risk when no one else will. Once they had been sent to PLAYBOY... Well, they aren't PLAYBOY's thing, are they?

Partington: This kind of story would have been ideal for that anthology you were in a year or two ago, THE INNER LANDSCAPE.

Aldiss: Yes, it would have been.

Partington: BEWARE. RELIGION! The one that got included was really out of place in that book.

Aldiss: Yes, it was just shoveled in. It was something that Mike Moorcock did in a hurry. But it's quite educational to find this, that something that can't be categorised - goodness knows they're quite straight forward, there is nothing esoteric about the stories, they are very sweet and simple to read. No one wanted them, couldn't manage them. I don't know where THE DAY WE EMBARKED FOR CYTHERA was submitted to before Mike bought it. I think I have a list. It went to a lot of places. It didn't go to FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION. Heaven knows, my agent may even have submitted it to ANALOG. (Laughs)

Partington: I find that incredible. To me they seem so commercial. While admittedly being odd, they should still strike a response in the aware reader.

Aldiss: I would have said so. I tried to make them as simple as anything. Basically, the premise is that there are certain people whose lives are charmed and invulnerable. And so terribly shoddy things can be going on around the edges; people dying, and plague, and soldiers marching off to war; but at the center there's always the saving grace of egotism that keeps life sweet and happy.

Partington: Which science fiction writers do you yourself admire?

Aldiss: Well I'm an old hardened case, you know. I don't like many of them, that's the







honest truth.

Partington: Do you still read science fiction?

Aldiss: Yes I do. I've read more this year than I've read in years - for BILLION YEAR SPREE.

Partington: Do you like David Lindsay?

Aldiss: No, I don't. I like William Hope Hodgson, despite all his shortcomings, his archaic speech, you know.

Partington: And HOUSE ON THE BORDERLAND?

Aldiss: All those marvellous chapters where time goes by and he's transfixed at the window. That's tremendous.

Partington: What is it you don't like about Lindsay?, his clumsy use of English?

Aldiss: All his people, Numbskull, Mashskull, and all the rest. I don't know what it's all about. I've just tried to re-read it for BILLION YEAR SPREE. What is it you like about it?

Partington: It would take too long. Colin Wilson and Visiak recommend it as a deeply religious book, even an almost mystical experience.

Aldiss: Well this is what C.S. Lewis said. Lewis was hot for it.

Partington: Yes, everybody who's read and understood it is pushing the religious aspect.

Aldiss: C.S. Lewis failed to persuade me and I doubt if anyone else will ever persuade me.

Partington: I think you have a blind spot for hard fantasy. Kingsley Amis has this too.

Aldiss: I think there's a very good reason. Science fiction always has some sort of touch-stone in reality. Anything can happen in fantasy, and so I'm never surprised by it. Suddenly a severed head will talk or a sword will get up of its own volition and stab someone. They're just not tools I can use in writing myself; if you're a writer you've always got this chip on your shoulder -- you're liking the sort of things you think you can do yourself. You begin sweet and innocent, reading everything and enjoying everything, but gradually you narrow down to the things that you can feed on yourself. It's a sort of vampiric process. There are writers you can draw nourishment from and writers you can't.

Partington: Well, who do you draw nourishment from?

Aldiss: I was telling David earlier that I've just read Stapleton's STARMAKER. Fantastic. Christ!... There's a Dover book edition with LAST AND FIRST MEN and STARMAKER in it. They really are staggering novels indeed. The sort of ultimate classic science fiction novel. The human spirit finally meets the starmaker and has this vision not just of our present universe, but all the ones the starmaker started with. Incredible universes that are stored away like old toys in a toy cupboard. And this glimpse is given of them. Some of the early ones were so flimsy they haven't even got dimension, they have music or

something like music instead. And then the later ones! You think, 'Oh, I can't hold anymore!' But Olaf Stapleton goes on and tells you about the next universes to follow ours! Just amazing. I'm only glad I didn't read it many years ago because you can't go any further than that. STARMAKER'S really the sort of ultimate novel.

Partington: It's a complete novel without any form of characterisation at all. It's very odd in that aspect.

Aldiss: He refuses to say it's a novel. I forget what he says about it. He calls it a poetic essay or a philosophical essay or something. Thereby avoiding the issue of whether it's a novel or not. But it's much more difficult, I think, to sustain a readers interest in something like that if it has not got any characters.

Partington: That's why it's unusual. There's nothing for the reader to latch on to. There's nobody to identify with, yet it still holds.

Aldiss: That's why it's so daring. You've got to be compelled by his ideas and language; there's nothing else there. Stapleton's thrown it all away and just gone for the ultimate thing. A very daring book.

Partington: What are your views on religion?

Aldiss: I could give you my David Frost thing now, couldn't I?

Partington: In your books you don't seem to believe in a religious God as such; yet you have that 'as if it were planned' sort of mood.

Aldiss: Well I've got a religious sense of life, that's true. And yet, I don't believe in the regulation God. This is to say intellectually, you know. The emotional side of you speaks as well. I've got a very good friend, a man called Robert Baldick, who is tremendously talented. He's at Pembroke College in Oxford. He lectures in French literature. He translated all the French novels for Penguin classics - Zola, Balzac and so on. He did Verne's TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA. A very talented man. A marvellous chap. So nice, with a smashing second wife, an American girl. They found out that he's got a brain tumour at the beginning of this year. Such a waste! A brilliant brain there. I don't know. He's obviously not got very long to live. Margaret and I heard the news from his wife Jackie. And I was storming around in a terrible rage, shaking my fists upwards and saying, "You bastard! You bastard! What the hell do you think you are doing up there?" And Margaret said to me "Come on, you know there's no one up there!"

But when you're emotional you think on a different level from the intellectual. It seems to me proven that there can't be anyone up there! A prime-mover, alright, someone who presses the button. Surely we are of a generation that accepts our earth as a sort of spaceship where everything has been recycled? Using the sun as a power source is



\* Robert Baldick died only three weeks after this conversation was taped. He was forty four.





now a very simple idea, but highly esoteric at the turn of the century. Now we understand that all the stuff on earth, in various combinations, is used over and over again. What is it in Omar Khayyam? 'I sometimes think there never blooms so red a rose as where some buried Caesar bled.' Early example of re-cycling. If you accept this then there's nothing to individual life, to one generation - it's just part of an endless cycle. As the dinosaurs have been ground down, so the human species will eventually be ground down. There's nothing technology can do about that. Technology is itself a tiny part of this monstrous process, and that's that. Look at Ted Carnell, not lost but gone before! They are all going to be ground down. That's the way it's got to be. And to think that Anyone takes particular cognisance of this, except to look down occasionally and say, 'Huh, it's still brewing down there!' is rather laughable. I would have liked to say that to those angry young clergy on the Frost show on Sunday and see what they thought of it.

Partington: How, or were you, influenced in any way, or did you write any stories specifically for the New Wave when it developed? I ask this because your writing seemed to undergo a change around about then.

Aldiss: I think I did undergo a change. I suddenly thrust off what for me were rather fruitless years. I got married again. Life began anew.

Partington: There had been some doubtful novels around then, hadn't there?

Aldiss: Well I think that I started quite well, with THE BRIGHTFOUNT DIARIES first of all, SPACE, TIME AND NATHANIEL, NON-STOP and HOTHOUSE. From then on, I was on the run for several years. Then things settled down and I could think, get on with life again. And I believe my writing's improved. In fact, when I was writing BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, the first section, JUST PASSING THROUGH, was something I did to humour Bonfiglioli. "Oh Brian," he said, "people write so dreadfully. Just write me a little story. Please won't you?" So I did this little, rather horrible story. And then became obsessed with the tremendous theme of everyone on drugs. It was just when the drug thing was coming in and it seemed worthwhile investigation. I suppose it comes back to the religious question. How do you achieve a vision in a non-God world? Maybe it should be through drugs. By the end of the novel I'd

reached the decision that really drug-culture leads backwards, a backward step. Really, mankind shouldn't abandon any of the precious things it's got, like intellect and art, and so I saw an abandonment to drugs as a sort of soft-centered thing that wouldn't get mankind anywhere. And I let myself go on those stories, and was encouraged by Michael Moorcock. When I sent the second one, not to Bonfiglioli but to Mike, MULTIVALUE MOTORWAY, he obviously got a lot of charge out of it and said "OK. Send me more." And I did actually get shitty letters from people saying, "Come on you bastard, what are you writing these things for? Go back and do NONSTOP again!" An impossible thing to say. There you are! That was enough. I put all that I thought and felt at that time into BAREFOOT. I was writing it for about two and a half years and I know there are many scientific ideas in it. Unfortunately, of course, at first people just see the style, they don't see the content that I packed in. But again I felt as I did in THE DARK LIGHT YEARS that if you're going to build a living novel then its no good writing a diagram. You've got to be in there with the people, you've got to try and think as your characters do, hence understand the way everyone talks.



Partington: What do you think of Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius, Brian?

Aldiss: Oh I don't really know. I think it's a good idea, and maybe THE FINAL PROGRAMME is Mike's nicest novel, but then there's a lot of Mike in that.

Partington: THE FINAL PROGRAMME is, partly, Elric re-written.

Aldiss: Well so everyone says, but you see I'm in the fortunate position of not reading Elric, so I don't notice that. Moorcock, despite all his flamboyance, is genuinely modest; This diffidence will not always let him come through, and if he ever gave a pure blast of Moorcock the heavens would probably resound. But what we get is intermittent Moorcock. You know, every now and then Moorcock's revealing to much of himself, so he closes the shutters and you get a bit more TARZAN ADVENTURES or something.

Partington: He probably revealed more of himself in BEHOLD THE MAN than he had intended.

Aldiss: Yes, I think so. I'll tell you of a thing I'm doing now. I've got a project on called HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS. I derived the idea, really, from THE SHAPE OF FURTHER THINGS. I thought that more science fiction writers ought to write about themselves and that now there's a sufficient market for people to be interested in, it's perfectly legitimate to be interested in how writers write, particularly in fandom where everybody sort of has a hand in the process. I thought this over and just typed out a sort of coaxing page, buttering them up as you have to do with writers, saying, 'If only Shakespeare had left a short memoir of himself how indebted we would be. And as the Shakespeares of tomorrow it's up to us science fiction writers,





since no one else is damn well interested, to provide their own little bit.' I sent this to Harry Harrison, I sent it to Damon Knight, I sent it to Fred Pohl and they all said yes, With unqualified enthusiasm they thought it was a good idea, and would write a memoir. I would have liked to have sent my proposal to Ballard, but I believed that would have been an impossible proposition. I sent it to Mike. You know, Mike's life is very interesting and if he would only just write about it it would be fascinating to read. After a long time I got a hurried postcard saying, "Dear Brian, Genuinely grateful; terribly flattered, but absolutely can't. Far too modest." And this is Moorcock. Blast it, he is modest! You know, there are writers within a stones throw of here who would leap at the chance. But Moorcock can't bear it. So I wrote him a long letter explaining all he had to do, no self-praise, just talk about the important things that have gone on, founding the BSFA, Scandinavia, New Worlds, all that sort of thing. But I haven't heard from him and I don't think he'll do it.

**Partington:** HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS sounds interesting. Do you think it will get off the ground?

**Aldiss:** Yes. I mean there are plenty of other people who would come in on it despite all its



obvious pit-falls, It's a ghastly thing to do. Keith Freeman said to me, "Terrible about Ted Carnell. Do you realise that you are one of the few old timers left?" Yet it doesn't feel like that to me. I didn't know about fandom until I started writing. I still feel parvenu here! But it's true, and another generation is coming up. God, we'll all seem like dinosaurs in a few years. Let's get it down, engrave it onto stone, let people read it, pick the bones out of it.

**Partington:** You were telling me earlier that you were well advanced with your latest novel. What is it called?

**Aldiss:** Yes, the first draft's alright. It's a sort of space-opera. It's called **THE EIGHTY MINUTE HOUR - A SPACE OPERA**. You remember I told you it had a very complicated plot. People actually go to the planets - you've never had that in an Aldiss story before! - piss about on Mars. All sorts of horrible things are in it. For instance total contraception has been introduced, the CapCon treaty has just been signed. The CapCon treaty is an agreement between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. to live friendly for the next thousand years; and to cement this relationship they decide to restore the old landbridge between Europe and Asia, so they build a dam across the Baring Straits. You know a Russian buddy of mine has actually written a book about this. It's a great engineering project with only the capitalists standing in the way. So they build this dam, and of course, this means the Pacific is very much warmer, there's no Alaskan current. So the Soviets can open up their Far East and the Americans can exploit Alaska. All the Pacific trading community is going very strong, Japan, South Korea, Australia way down there.



Meanwhile, the Atlantic community is declining and decaying since the Arctic ocean has been trapped. But Britain's been blown up anyway; all that's left of Britain is the Koh-I-Noor, everything's blasted to hell. A little fragment of the Tower of London survives and the Koh-I-Noor is washed up on the shores of Britany. The USA and the USSR find that the international date-line gets in the way so they're having it moved from the Pacific over to the Atlantic, to the great discomfort of everyone thereabouts. There are various things like this, all sorts of notions I've shovelled in, all sortsof ideas I've had around for a long time. Plus a drinking scene to end all drinking scenes. And every now and then, to justify the sub-title, people stop and they sing. They all have arias.

**Partington:** Oh come on Brian, your're sending it up.

**Aldiss:** No. No. Its true, absolutely straight forward science-fiction. And they all sing songs. One's called 'Evolution's bothering me' a very jolly thing.

**Partington:** Are you sending it to Ace? (Laughter).

**Aldiss:** No, I wont. Its going to be about two hundred thousand words long by the time I've finished it. I was so keen on it that I had to practically tear myself away and go to the states, and I got my typist to type it out and send it to me airmail so that I could work on it in California. And it came and I didn't even unwrap it -- just too much going on. That's how it stays until I finish off BILLION YEAR SPREE. But directly I finish BILLION YEAR SPREE, which will be at the end of June, 1972, it's back to THE EIGHTY MINUTE HOUR.

**Partington:** Are you happy with BILLION YEAR SPREE.

**Aldiss:** Oh yes. Its full of lovely stuff, really, really nice! It's the pure quill about the history of science-fiction as I've worked it out in my little mind, very different from every body else's. Not a book primarily for the fans. That's ridiculous. It's a book for the general reader telling them what they've been missing all this time. Not saying how great it is, saying much of it's bloody awful. But pointing out what's nice about it, what's fun, what's interesting, stuff they should have known long ago. It's all in there, a joyous read.

**Partington:** You're not using it as a serious critical vehicle then?

**Aldiss:** Well, it's a serious critical vehicle as well. I mean I can't do it without performing an act of criticism, for one thing by omission. There are certain people that I'm absolutely dead to as writers, so I don't say too much about them. Its going to be a







very lop-sided book, full of enthusiasm.

Partington: What do you think of SOLARIS?

Aldiss: I would like it a lot better if I hadn't heard such a lot of praise from second rate critics. It is quite a nice strange book and that's quite a striking idea about the sentient ocean. But I don't believe that the English translation does it justice. Somewhere in the middle of the book there's a serious gulf I can't quite think what it is.... I like the ocean but... I like the other Polish writer a lot better, that's a chap called Slavomir Mrozek.

Partington: Brian, how do you feel about the lack of an outlet for writers. We don't have a regular magazine for science-fiction in Britain. Does this disturb you?

Aldiss: It doesn't disturb me personally.

Partington: No, but we do have a situation at the moment where established authors find it relatively easy to get their work published but we don't seem to have a breeding ground for new talent.

Aldiss: From that point of view it's extremely bad, I can't see at the moment what sort of magazine is wanted and I really think that if one could see it, then there might be a viable possibility of producing it. Definitely not a VISIONS OF TOMORROW type magazine.

Partington: Ken Bulmer had the right idea with



SWORD AND SORcery, though not necessarily with that title.

Aldiss: Maybe so. That's for you, not me.

Partington: Do you feel that it would have been a commercial success, that it would have sold?

Aldiss: Yes, I think it would have done. I'm sure it would. I also think that Ken Bulmer would have been a damn good editor. Though what worries me now, and things are being done about this, is what happens to Ted Carnell's series NEW WRITINGS IN SF. (this series is now being edited by Ken Bulmer.)

Partington: I've never really been happy with this series.

Aldiss: It's pretty awful. But I think there's a chance yet. I mean, sweet old Ted, he really didn't know one end of a story from the other.

If someone else took it over, and I know who Corgi has in mind, then that would be something people in the field would like a lot more. It's selling like mad at the moment, lousy though it is. Corgi are very happy with it, they don't want to let it die. I was rather surprised; now they've got up to twenty, they're reprinting the early ones and they are doing the Best of the Best.... You know.

Partington: They are appalling collections, that's true, but the paperback format seems to be the only viable way of selling magazines. But it's still an opportunity for new writers to display their talent







Aldiss: What makes it an opportunity is that the books have to appear regularly, so they've got to be filled with what happens to be available. Damon Knight has an irregular schedule, or pretty irregular, with ORBIT so that he can wait until he's got the material he wants; and so that's cheating! But Carnell's NEW WRITINGS IN SF had to be published twice a year so that he was always mildly desperate. And in the last week if you got a weak story in when space remained to be filled then it was accepted. Obviously Ted often got a lot of bum



Partington: Everyone holds him in such respect though. They still say he was a good anthologist.

Aldiss: I don't know if I'd say that. He was here and no one else was doing anything, so such talent as there was gravitated towards him. But there were special things about Ted. For one thing his extraordinary niceness.

Partington: I wasn't really talking about him as a person, but as an editor.

Aldiss: Ah, but it rubs off, don't you see? One disruptive shit at the top can really foul up our little world of science fiction - that's absolutely true. But Ted was an exceptionally nice guy and ordinarily honest. He would never swindle you out of a halfpenny. Very, very honest indeed, very gentlemanly to deal with. Never swore, just had a gin and tonic on a Sunday. Highly respectable. All the publishers and the other agents liked him immensely. I wrote his obituary in the



Brian W. Aldiss.

stories in them. I found the same when I first began selling to him for NEW WORLDS. I remember sending him a story which I thought well of, called THE FAILED MEN. I got a letter back by return saying, 'Dear Brian, this will amuse you. I was going to reject your story, which I think is awful, but I found I'd got a gap of five thousand words, so it's going to be in the next issue.' Oh yes, I was so amused by a letter like that... (Laughs...) Terrible. Oh God, Carnell was so depressing.





Times and I said this,, because it was very important. Most people, when they thought of science-fiction in the publishing world, thought, 'I'll ring up old Ted Carnell.' And there wasn't someone at the other end who said, "No, I'm not going to deal with you," or who was a swindler using his writers to his own crooked ends....Ted had a sense of tact, and quite honestly, if he'd been an awful cheapskate like, oh I don't know, whoever was a cheapskate -- name your favourites -- the picture would be very different. But without any literary skill at all he built his business up gradually. Any writer over thirty at this convention went through Ted at one time or another, and they always had the same experience.



Eventually you had to get away from Ted because he was too nice to be a publisher. He'd never screw them and say, "Come on, this guy is starving. Now pay me two hundred and fifty pounds instead of a hundred." He would never do that. So the writers were starving. But everyone broke away in the nicest possible manner, after awful heart-searching. I've seen everyone do it. Mike did it, Ballard did it. Even Ballard who can be so ferocious was gentle breaking away from Ted. Everyone did it with a terrific amount of finesse. With one exception who we won't name who just about had a law-suit. But on the whole people just snuck away, and Ted kept everything very sweet behind the scenes; this is why I think that on the whole, whatever the difference between British writers, they may hate each other's point of view, or hate each other personally, but they all agree to behave civilly in public. Carnell didn't turn up much at conventions, but there was always Carnell around. You did actually love the man. A very different kettle of fish from Campbell - Carnell never originated an idea. No, that's not entirely true, sometimes he did. I suppose he encouraged James White to go and to write those endless SECTOR GENERAL stories. That must have been a Carnell idea. He certainly encouraged me to write NON-STOP as a novel. On the whole he was a very quiet man who didn't give out much; but he kept everything going and this is why you can really speak well of him. He was a good positive force in his way. What happens now I don't know. His agency has been bequeathed to Les Flood, but what Les will do with it I really don't know, with his bookshop and everything to run. (Les Flood's shop has since been sold.)

Partington: What do you think of Moorcock as an editor?

Aldiss: Well, Moorcock had the genuine flame. When that thing happened Moorcock really did his nut. Very nice, very rare thing to see. I also think that perhaps the flame has gone out. I don't find the quarterlies exciting. NEW WORLDS was genuinely exciting, however much nonsense was in it.

Partington: Do you think that it was the pressure placed upon him that made the flame go out or was it just a drifting away?

Aldiss: I may have been that as well.

Partington: I think it was the only way he could keep the quarterly alive by having no really unconventional stuff in it.

Aldiss: In a way. And so much of his own money went into that thing. He's not here now because he's writing six novels, writing off the debt to the printer that he incurred

over the old NEW WORLDS. If you know the history of ARKHAM HOUSE. In a bibliography of ARKHAM HOUSE August Derleth relates the story of his struggles. And he says "Contrary to the generally accepted opinion that I was living off the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, I funneled in...." oh some enormous sum of money simply through his own hack writing to keep the publishing company going. Tremendous dedication that.. Twenty-five thousand dollars over ten years, or something like that.

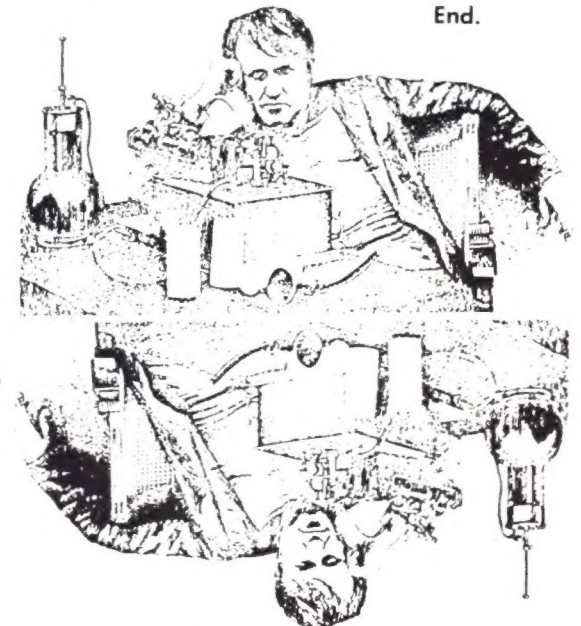
Partington: ARKHAM HOUSE would print say two thousand copies of books like THE DARK MAN or NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS, and it might take six or seven years to get rid of them. Ridiculous. Aldiss: Yes, that's sad. None of it went to Derleth of course. That's a bad thing. Also he inspired all the other houses. SHASTA and GNOME and all the rest started up after ARKHAM HOUSE. People took courage from

Derleth's example. And again to come back to Ted, people took courage from Ted, because however awful those magazines were they had one prime virtue, they appeared regularly. No one else managed to do that. They actually appeared regularly! You could go to the bookstalls and there they were on time, the same shaggy old writers in there. All those frantic people, E.R. James and Francis G. Reyner, couldn't put two words together in the right order.

Partington: It's amazing, you flick through some of those old magazines from the fifties and you can't help but wonder where are they all now?

Aldiss: They've gone back into the woodwork. Ready to live again, just bring back VISIONS OF TOMORROW and they'll all come scuttling out. You know, Beep! Beep! their little antennae going, smelling some horrible cheap market. (Pause) I have this tremendous sense of continuity with what's going on in science fiction, sort of developed in me while I was writing BILLION YEAR SPREE. I see this continuity, and I also see how, Christ, I've said as much against fandom as anyone, but it is absolutely true that it's that central core of enthusiasm that keeps things going, and guys who come in as fans, who eventually rise up to become editors -- look at Fred Pohl there, distinguished fellow, he was running about in knickerbockers editing a magazine at thirteen, or something preposterous. He was just another fan. And presumably that's the way it goes on. There's obviously something awful about science fiction that most people can't bear. It needs someone with enthusiasm just to keep it going.

End.





# Letter on Hodgson.

It is with interest that I noted your publication "Weird Fantasy", No 2, since a magazine dealing with the weird tale is sadly lacking at the moment.

It is in regard to your published article by S. Birchby, "Sexual Symbolism in William Hope Hodgson" that impells me to write. As for "The Night Land" (Ed note: THE NIGHT LAND had not been published here when we received this letter) I am not qualified to reply since I have not read it but with regard to the section dealing with "House on the Borderland", I feel that the article gives a totally misleading and inaccurate impression of the work. The supposed sexual symbolism rests rather upon certain incidental elements in the story rather than in reference to the whole tenor of the story which is essentially a cosmological cum-scientific fantasy. The swine creatures are more the monster element found in any story of this type, being related in nuance to the Weed Men of "Boats of the Glen Carrig", and assorted sea monsters of "Deep Waters" than having a specific sexual reference which the writer of the article intends. These creatures are given a role far beyond their exact specification in the book, the sexual associations suggested are manifestly unsuitable and irrelevant to the theme of the work.

The description of the side of the pit is quoted far out of context and given a meaning superimposed upon it by Mr Birchby which Hodgson had obviously not intended.

As for the relation of the female character in the book to the Recluse's mother, it all depends as to whether the so-called womb imagery fits into the work. Appended to the novel is a short poem, as in "Boats of the Glen Carrig", obviously relevant to it. Would not another interpretation be that the spiritual female was the hero's dead wife or sweetheart who could contact him in specific instances due to the peculiar position of the house? As the hero is a mature man, he would have got over his mother's death some time before, but, as in the novels of the period, should not the influence be that as suggested above rather than the other interpretation? That physical love was an animal thing is certainly not the case in the end of "Glen Carrig" nor in the short story "From the Tideless Sea" where the happy outcome is always children. The True love there, does not spurn physical contact.

The author himself admits that doubtless none of his intended nuances were meant to be displayed either by characters or author, the allegory being relevant to a post-Freudian generation. The relevance of the criticised Freudian approach in modern psychology, its defects and necessary emendations, should have been more fully discussed. If none of these nuances were intended then how can we be meant to excavate this middle level of allegory, such an approach thus being irrelevant.

With regard to your magazine, I would suggest less artistry and inclusion of items on Lovecraft and others such as Clark Ashton Smith, especially the memoirs written about about the former in the now rare and inaccessible Arkham House volumes

Tony Williams, Manchester University.





The Journal Of Adult Fantasy; Incorporating 'RUBBER NEWS.'

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D. Britton 22nd Oct 73

